

COOKING AND SEWING FOR BLIND
STUDENTS

Isabel Betz

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COOKING AND SEWING FOR BLIND STUDENTS

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The opinion has often been expressed that day school classes for the blind could not offer as adequate training in household arts as is provided in special institutions. This need not be the case if a special course is conducted to meet the needs of blind students.

There have been day school classes for blind children in the public schools of Cleveland since 1909. During these years the program has varied slightly; but in substance it has remained the same. Besides following the required course of study in our schools and participating in the regular class recitations in competition with their sighted classmates, blind pupils have had music, gymnasium work, handwork, manual training for boys, household arts including cooking and sewing for girls, in special class groups under experienced teachers.

This paper describes the work of a household arts class composed of girls in the sixth to ninth grades inclusive. While none of these pupils is able to see enough to be educated by means of print books, there are more and more of those enrolled in braille classes who have useful vision. Even a slight degree of vision makes it less difficult for a girl to learn to handle utensils and to become efficient in the duties connected with homemaking than for a girl with absolutely no sight. Nevertheless, the same work is required of the girl who does not see at all and progress is at a rate commensurate with her ability.

Since there is no time during the week when all the girls are free to meet for the required time, the braille class in foods and household management meets for three hours on Saturday morning. The course is planned to give the girl a general and practical working knowledge of family life and its requirements; to create greater interest in household problems, including sanitation, health, and personal care; and to give knowledge of how to select, prepare, and serve foods.

It is necessary that the class be small, for it is not possible to use group instruction as with sighted girls. That in the class there are a number of grade divisions, means that some have had some training and experience while others have had none.

The course of study for regular junior high school classes is followed as far as possible. The progress of the braille pupil is necessarily slower because of inability to visualize processes or to learn from observation.

an effort and progress slowly but surely. Dr. Menninger tells them that "I can't" is like a big stone wall, and the way over is to add "ry," and change it to "I can try."

The children take great delight and interest in handwork, and whatever may be an aid in muscular coordination is encouraged. Coloring develops the color sense and a feeling of color harmony and gives the child a real pleasure in having created something.

A description of one special project may illustrate the practical working of the school's method. A project on cotton was developed much as with an ordinary group; the steps were taken more slowly, and more preparation, emphasis, and suggestions on the part of the teacher were necessary; but enthusiasm, interest, and pride in achievement were observed throughout the entire project. The special interest and ability of the group naturally determined the scope of the project.

The approach was made through discussion of materials for clothing and why cotton was used. The children found pictures of cotton growing, picking, ginning, baling, and manufacture of cotton threads, read about the cotton industry in their geographical reader, and finally had a chance to see real cotton plants.

The first problem was to know the kinds of material used for clothing; the second, to recognize the appearance and feel of such cotton materials as gingham, muslin, calico, print; the third, to learn the care of cotton cloth and the effect of soap, hot water, and sun on it; and the fourth and last, to learn how cotton cloth is made. Various correlations were made with other work, such as language study, arithmetic, geography (both of the United States and foreign countries), industrial arts, fine arts, and science. For example, in industrial arts, the class planted cotton seed and cared for it, made booklets on the subject, and wove small rugs. In fine arts, color harmonies were studied, and a design was made for the booklets. In science, the children saw the effects of soap on printed cloth, of sun on unbleached cloth, and observed shrinkage.

This cotton project was of especial interest to an older girl with a personality problem as well as a physical affliction. She very much disliked being grouped with the other children, feeling that her age and mentality placed her in a class above, while they had an aversion for her egotism and were happier in their separate ways. As her specialty was cooking and sewing, the "cotton project" easily supplemented her sewing and led to further individual textile and clothing study in which she was happy.

Each step must be demonstrated by the teacher to the individual child, learning must come by doing, and repetition of even the simplest processes is essential. Regular class work, home training, and experience play important parts in a class of this kind. Discussions help to develop interest on the part of the pupil who is encouraged to suggest problems and ways and means of performing each step in their solution.

The selection, preparation, and serving of foods is especially important in the development of the normal blind girl in order that she may compete with the sighted members of her family and do her share of work in the home. The measuring of ingredients is one of the first things to be learned and takes repeated practice before accuracy is obtained. Accuracy rather than speed is stressed for the pupil who does not see, but there should be no dawdling. The recipes used must be clear, concise, and simple in order to avoid confusion and failure in the results.

Most blind girls have an aversion to lighting the top and oven burners of the gas stove but are not afraid to use them. This fear of putting the match to the gas may be overcome if the child becomes accustomed to the lighted stove before she is asked to start the flame. Confidence is also gained when a girl who has had some experience lights the burner for the beginner. The latter then practices with the help of the teacher in order to avert any chance of being frightened by a burn.

Each girl prepares and serves the dish planned for the day's lesson. Table service and etiquette are discussed at each serving. A complete meal is occasionally prepared. Together the girls plan the menu and discuss the procedure for its preparation; then each girl assumes certain duties for which she is to be responsible. Home projects are also necessary if the girls are to become efficient in an environment other than the school kitchen.

After three years of training, the girls should have sufficient skill and interest to contribute to the care of the home or even to take the major responsibility if necessary. There have been instances where the mother was the wage earner outside the home and where all of the household duties fell upon the blind daughter who did her work in a way that would do credit to any sighted girl.

For sewing and handwork, the braille class meets for forty-five minutes four times each week. This group is also small as there are a number of grades represented and much time would be lost if girls had to wait too long for help from the teacher. This course is planned to enable a girl without sight to learn how to select clothing, how to care for clothing, and to know materials; also, to acquire skill in repairing her own clothes

and in making simple garments. The blind girls learn the stitches in the elementary grades and have some experience in sewing before being assigned to the special junior high school class where the work becomes more difficult. "Calyx-eyed" or self-threading needles are used for hand sewing and small wire needle threaders are used to thread the sewing machine needles. It is necessary to pin and baste all seams, and considerable time and patience is required in order that each girl may work up to the limit of her ability and accomplish the desired amount of work as independently as possible.

The outline for regular clothing classes is followed, but it is impossible for all to develop the same speed and skill; therefore, it is not advisable to require the same achievements from all in the group. Some need more repetition than others. Repetition may be obtained by making several garments for which the same construction methods are used.

A cooking apron and cap are usually made first. The straight seams in these give good practice in the use of the sewing machine and the arm gauge. The latter is set so that the edge of the material touches it as the seam is stitched at the required place. The cutting and most of the fitting must be done by the teacher.

Each problem may be used for class discussion, during which the suitability of the garment as to type, material, construction methods, and usefulness may be decided upon. Sometimes garments are brought from home to be remodeled and repaired. Knitting, crocheting rugs with roving, and basket weaving are also continued from the grade work, but are stressed as home rather than school projects.

The degree of skill in sewing which the girls will reach during junior high school depends upon home cooperation, school training, and individual aptitude. Girls from these classes are prepared to do sewing and specialty shop work under supervision for a livelihood, and some have been so employed.

HOME ECONOMICS FOR THE DEAF

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Less than a century and a half ago it was considered almost an impossibility to educate a "deaf and dumb" child, and it was not until 1817 that the first school for the deaf was founded in America. At present there are 18,767 deaf children receiving education in special schools in this country. The residential schools in which the pupils

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